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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S POLITICAL ISSUES, IRAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies all gave front-page coverage February 2 to Rebar Group founder Wang You-theng and his wife, who reportedly boarded a Singapore Airlines flight from Los Angeles and stopped over in Singapore today en route to Myanmar (Burma). Coverage also focused on former President Lee Teng-hui's recent remarks on Taiwan independence, on the reshuffle of high-ranking Taiwan military officials, and on other political issues. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" criticized President Chen Shui-bian and the DPP for inciting illusory "psychological Taiwan independence" in an attempt to tear apart Taiwan's society and fish in troubled waters, because they know in their hearts that there is no prospect for "de jure Taiwan independence." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, criticized the international media outlets for showing no interest in reporting on Taiwan's political situation. The "International Outlook" column in the pro-status quo "China Times," on the other hand, criticized the United States' "messy" Iran policy, saying Washington should not have helped to remove Iran's enemies. End summary.

¶2. Taiwan's Political Issues

A) "'De Jure Taiwan Independence' Runs into a Blind Alley, but 'Psychological Taiwan Independence' Keeps Burning Hot!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (2/2):

"... But even though both Chen Shui-bian and the DPP know clearly that there is no prospect for 'de jure Taiwan independence,' they have been adding fuel to 'psychological Taiwan independence.' Their moves, such as expanding efforts to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the February 28 Incident, pushing the campaign to write a new constitution, and seeking proactively to 'de-ROC-ify' Taiwan's history textbooks, are all evident attempts to ignite and manipulate 'psychological Taiwan independence' from cultural, social and educational aspects. ...

"As a result, [the pursuit of] 'Taiwan independence' becomes not an external battle but an internal struggle; people are not really pushing for 'de jure Taiwan independence' but are stirring up illusory 'psychological Taiwan independence' in an attempt to tear society apart and fish in troubled waters. In fact, Chen and the DPP know very clearly in their hearts that there is absolutely no possibility of 'de jure Taiwan independence.' Then why on earth do they want to destroy the Republic of China and push for 'de-ROC-ification' on the social, psychological and cognitive levels? ..."

B) "An Independent Taiwan in 2008?"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation:

30,000] editorialized (2/2):

"... International media outlets do a good job of reporting on events in Taiwan, as long as there is a sexy cross-strait or business angle. But when it comes to pedestrian issues, such as political reform, most news outlets fall short. Correspondents for international wire, print or broadcast media who approach their overseas editors with a story lacking a 'China angle' have a tough fight on their hands. ... When policymakers from, say, the US are left in the dark about basic aspects of Taiwan's society and political system, they cannot be expected to formulate meaningful policy. Much of the think-tank and analyzing that goes on in Washington is mere regurgitation of what is reported in major media outlets. Only a handful of specialists possesses in-depth knowledge of Taiwan. Meanwhile, most 'experts' who write or comment widely on the US' foreign policy toward Taiwan, China or East Asia have only superficial knowledge of Taiwanese politics. ... Why will any of this matter outside of Taiwan? Given the changes, it is possible that a party could win a legislative super-majority, enabling it to do all kinds of things, such as write a new constitution. Or declare independence. Even the international media would notice that."

13. Iran

"The United States Makes One Error after Another with Regard to Its Iran Policy"

The "International Outlook" column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] noted (2/2):

"... In fact, the United States has always been messy in handling the Iran issue. ... If Washington sees Iran as a big problem, it should not have removed its enemies... Iran had two major enemies, one was the Taliban of Afghanistan, which threatened Iran because it was supported by Pakistan, and the other was Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

... Luckily [for Iran] the United States has been a great help; it destroyed the Taliban of Afghanistan and killed Saddam Hussein in Iraq, clearing away all the neighboring threats for Iran. Iran, in return, started to re-manage its relations with the two. What else could this be if not luck? Now the United States is even giving up on Iran and starting to help Iraq. If it wants to do so, why didn't it keep Saddam Hussein in the first place and let him deal with Iran? If one makes a comparison between Saddam Hussein and Iran, which one on earth is more threatening to the United States' global strategy?"

WANG